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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0486
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2125
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 1285
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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SUSPECTED LTTE ARMS SMUGGLING FROM TAMIL NADU

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A chance discovery in southern Tamil Nadu of thousands of "gelex boosters" suspected to be on their way to Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has embarrassed the state police, who long have denied any arms movement from the state. Separately, the Indian Navy seized three rockets from fishermen who claimed to have scooped them out of the sea off Rameswaram. Despite the numerous government agencies monitoring the coast, some smuggling activity clearly goes on between India and Sri Lanka. Some Tamil Nadu political parties meanwhile raised their voices against the Sri Lankan Navy's alleged procurement of ammunition from India, bringing to the fore a Tamil Nadu consensus against India providing any military aid to the government of Sri Lanka. END SUMMARY

AN ACCIDENTAL SEIZURE OF ARMS

¶2. (SBU) On November 29, a private vehicle carrying thousands of "gelex boosters," used in explosive devices to enhance power, overturned at Manamadurai in south Tamil Nadu, spilling the contents from 30 packets. Receiving the information from locals, Tamil Nadu police seized the explosives and launched an investigation which so far has led to the arrest of three persons. In a December 8 meeting with us, Director General of Tamil Nadu Police D. Mukherjee said the police suspect that the boosters were being smuggled to Sri Lanka for the use of the LTTE. He added that the police have traced the origin of the boosters to a private company named Gouthami Explosives in Hyderabad.

¶3. (SBU) DGP Mukherjee said that the police were aware of ongoing smuggling of diesel, petrol and medicines to Sri Lanka, but had no clue about the movement of explosives. Admitting that the weapons movement would have gone undetected but for the accident, Mukherjee said the smuggling may not be an isolated case. He explained that the 1076 kilometers of Tamil Nadu's coastline are monitored by 300 police of the Coastal Security Group. Recognizing the need for better surveillance of the coast, the Center has allotted \$10 million under the Coastal Security Scheme to hire and train more police and to set up 12 more coastal police stations in Tamil Nadu, each equipped with speed boats. The recruitment and training of police is time consuming, the DGP said, pointing out that 10,000 vacancies exist in the TN police.

¶4. (SBU) Mukherjee, however, added that the LTTE's arms procurement is mostly from Europe and South East Asian countries, managed by Kumaran Padmanathan.

SIEZURE OF ROCKETS OFF INDIAN COAST

¶4. (SBU) Newspapers also reported finds of rockets off the Rameswaram coast between India and Sri Lanka. According to the initial report, on December 5, the Indian Navy seized from a fishing

boat a two-and-a-half foot rocket weighing 17 kilos and packed in a wooden box. The fishermen claimed they had caught the box in their nets. On December 10, the Navy seized two more rockets from fishing boats, and a naval officer told the press at Rameswaram that he could not rule out the possibility that the rockets were meant for the LTTE. The Hindu newspaper reported the rockets will be examined by the Naval Armament Depot at Visakhapatnam and the fishermen will be interrogated.

SRI LANKAN NAVY PROCUREMENT RAISES HACKLES

15. (SBU) Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu's small pro-LTTE political parties expressed dismay at the reported procurement of detonators by the Sri Lankan Navy from a Nagpur company. Some detonators were transported through Tamil Nadu for shipment from Tuticorin port to Colombo. On December 7, state police reportedly stopped a truck carrying 400,000 detonators at Madurai, but let it go after confirming that the transportation was legal. PMK Party founder Ramdoss expressed concern and anguish over the incident and demanded that the Center immediately stop all supplies of arms to Sri Lanka. During a recent visit to New Delhi, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi raised this issue with the Defense Minister.

SMUGGLING NETWORKS A CHALLENGE FOR POLICE

16. (SBU) COMMENT: In addition to the Tamil Nadu police and its anti-terrorist unit (Q Branch), the Indian Navy, the Coast Guard, and the Indian intelligence agencies all are active in monitoring the south Indian coast. There is no reason to suspect that arms are freely flowing between India and Sri Lanka -- an impression some media reports seem to convey. However, given the 1000-kilometer coastline, the thousands of fishing boats swarming the sea, and the corruption of the local police, some smuggling activity is taking

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place. Simultaneously, a Tamil Nadu political consensus seems to have solidified against India providing any form of military aid to Sri Lanka, supported by the DMK sympathies for the suffering Tamils of Sri Lanka, the high decibel propaganda of pro-LTTE parties, and the GOI guarantees ruling out any lethal aid to Sri Lanka. END
COMMENT. HOPPER